

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat"; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

A prose poem fragment known as "*Foebus abierat*", *Phoebus had gone (anon)* was discovered in 1960 by Peter Dronke, author of "*Medieval Latin And The Rise of The European love-Lyric*" (1965-6).<sup>1</sup> The original poem fragment is brief and its structure is simple. "*Foebus abierat*" was written to be performed to an audience, it is clearly a dream-vision lyric with a homiletic theme at its centre. Eavan Boland's translation of "*Foebus abierat*" titled "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*" was published in *Poetry*<sup>2</sup> (2008). The poem translation is accompanied by a brief translator's note authored by Eavan Boland which describes her interest in bringing this almost lost poem fragment to a modern audience. The theme and thrust of "*Foebus abierat*" is one of created tension between female transgression against the divine order and the almost occult religious mythos exposed at the centre of the work. The nature of "*Foebus abierat*" is described by Boland as a dream-vision lyric '*from the first stanza, with its moonlight and wild beasts, it's obvious that the agenda of this poem is magic rather than measure.*'<sup>3</sup> I will argue that whilst this opinion has veracity in the poem's translation and mystic overlay, the poem remains tenaciously adherent to the church doctrine of its time giving its reading an almost unbearable tension.

Eavan Boland's translation of "*Foebus abierat*"<sup>4</sup> follows on from her earlier translations of Irish and classical lyric poetry centring strong women characters at the heart of her poems and in her translated pieces. There is a sense that Boland is bringing the reader into a created space where legendary women like her Gráinne in "*Song*"<sup>5</sup> can have an independent existence, and where their perceived transgressions are actually a warrior cry for individuality and growth beyond the societal bounds that oppressed them. That this resonates with the absence of women poets and writers from the literary canon in post-independence Ireland. Boland's translation of "*Foebus Abierat*" brings an almost lost fragment of early poetry and its inherent tension into the realm of our contemporary understanding.

Eavan Boland's speech to the Poetry Book Society on *God's Make Their Own Importance: The Authority of the Poet In Our Time*<sup>6</sup> which I return to consistently, delineates the oppressiveness of being a woman poet in post-independent Ireland's creative development. The imaginative creation of the idea of *State* was an occupation for the heroic male poet. The imaginative creation of state, the engagement of the poet with conservative religiosity, and the oppressiveness of women's role embedded in article 41 of Ireland's Constitution has led to the radical impotence of the female poet's voice on issues of creative authority.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric* (Oxford 1968, 2nd ed.), vol. 2, pp. 332–341

<sup>2</sup> 'Poetry' (2008) A Poetry Foundation and Magazine publication

<sup>3</sup> From *Translator's Note: "Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over"* by Eavan Boland. *Poetry* (2008)

<sup>4</sup> Boland writes about the piece in "*A Journey With two Maps*" (Norton, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> "Song" by Eavan Boland from *The War Horse* (1975)

<sup>6</sup> *Gods make Their Own Importance: The Authority of the Poet in Our Time* (Poetry Book Society Productions, 1994)

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

That poetry is a marginalised artform is a given, that Irish women's poetry lacks authority is a national tragedy which no-one seems accountable for. What we search for in the poem and poem translation is the authority of the poet. An imaginative Ireland that lacks strong women characters is an intolerable Ireland that lacks subtle dimension. The most important revelation in Eavan Boland's poetry and translation work is that of internal tension, and in some cases of anarchic transgression. "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*" contains both in abundance.

Myth and legend were important in the creation of Ireland's cultural identity from the very outset of the post-independence period. The intellectual and cultural development of Irish women writers and artists were stymied by De Valera's Catholic Constitution. While Ireland's historical mythologies are populated with female warriors and queens, they were as good as written from history in the early modern period. Literary mothers and grandmothers were virtually inaccessible to the serious poetry reader. Eavan Boland's work in translation, and her reintroduction of mythos into common parlance has a reinvigorating aspect which we should not ignore. While "*Phoebus was gone, all gone his journey over*" was probably written by a woman, it presents us with some difficulty as the speaker protagonist ultimately submits to her humanity by recognising that her transgressive death wish is opposed to the divine order, which she does not wish to transcend or battle.

"*Foebus abierat*" contains both the sacred and the profane balanced finely within it despite the brevity of the original prose fragment. The postmodern poetry reader can choose to navigate an early poem like "*Foebus abierat*" through historical understanding, or to find her way through the original poem's sense, movement, and symbol cluster without the wellspring of common knowledge that was available to its listeners when it was first composed and performed. The translator's role, in this instance Eavan Boland, is to bring the contemporary reader into the world of "*Foebus abierat*".

Homiletic poems like "*Foebus abierat*" were expected to contain a moral lesson that was immediately recognisable to their intended audience. The modern poetry reader, when faced with such a work must begin to look at this translated poem as an object, as opposed to it being simply a poem which exists in the written pages of a magazine, in this case, **Poetry Magazine** <sup>7</sup>(2008). "*Foebus abierat*" was originally performed for an audience, as it draws from the vernacular ballad tradition in its monorhyme and strophic structure. Eavan Boland extends the original poem prose fragment poem out to five stanzas while retaining the original intent and thematic drive of the poem. Boland does not retain the original structure of the fragment and instead she contemporizes the piece.

---

<sup>7</sup>'Poetry' (2008) A Poetry Foundation and Magazine publication.

**Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over**

Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over.  
His sister was riding high: nothing bridled her.  
Her light was falling, shining into woods and rivers.  
Wild animals opened their jaws wide, stirred to prey.  
But in the human world all was sleep, pause, relaxation, torpor.

One night, in an April which had just gone by,  
The likeness of my love stood beside me suddenly.  
He called my name so quietly. He touched me gently.  
His voice was drowning in tears. It failed completely.  
His sighs overwhelmed him. Finally, he could not speak clearly.

I shuddered at his touch. I felt the fear of it.  
I trembled as if I knew the true terror of it.  
I opened my arms wide and pressed him against my body.  
Then I froze: I was ice, all ice. My blood drained into it.  
He had fled. Here was my embrace—and there was nothing in it.

Fully awake now, I cried out loudly:  
"Where are you fleeing to? Why are you rushing away?  
Wait, wait for me. If you want, I can enter there.  
Because the truth is, I want to live with you forever."  
But soon I regretted it—that I had spoken out this way.

And all the time, the windows of the terrace had been wide open.  
The light of the moon poured down; its beauty, its radiance.  
And I grieved and grieved. I grieved for so long.  
The tears flowed down my cheeks: tributaries of tears.  
It was a whole day before I could stop weeping. <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Eavan Boland's translation of "*Foebus abierat*" published in *Poetry* (2008) as "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over* "

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

That the poem’s contemporary translation is text based and found neatly pinned into the pages of a little magazine does not conceal its overtones of yearning desire, or its subtextual moral principle. “*Foebus abierat*” contains worlds. The modern poetry reader benefits from Boland's translation process in her recognition of and participation in the work of translation through her own reading of the translated work. While the material core of the poem object is unchanged, the ekphrastic or collaborative translator brings to the work a contemporary perspective. She achieves this solely through her use of language and image.

Our post-modern relationship to poetry is nullified by our understanding of what the poem has become: an externalised self-dialogue foisted upon an unforgiving and uninterested public. Magazines shoot out neat and tidy forty line poems as a hen produces her eggs. Ideas and themes contained in the poetic form are limited by our contemporary approach to poetry to such an extent that the modern poem can be merely a shard of narrated experience with little of value or even universal recognition of the themes therein. It could be said that we are self-alienated from once universal ideals like the shared sense of religiosity and its concomitant underpinning moral philosophical system that our ancestors enjoyed to a great degree.

The triumph of individualism has allowed us create multiple responses to the poetry of the past, often leading to skewed interpretations of the original work. This can be a good thing as it freshens dialogue and widens contemporary perspectives on the poem. The job of the poem translator is to retain as much of the original intent and movement of the poem while contemporizing it for a modern audience. Poetry translation can be confrontational, dynamic, and ekphrastic. That we have diluted the meaning of poetry ekphrasis, limiting it to a type of poetic collaboration in the visual art and musical fields does not necessitate that the poet translator should atrophy or limit her response to the poem as art object,

*“Ekphrastic poems are now understood to focus only on works of art—usually paintings, photographs, or statues. And modern ekphrastic poems have generally shrugged off antiquity's obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects.”*<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>From ‘*Ekphrasis: Poetry Confronting Art*’ | Academy Of American Poets

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

Our reading of Boland's translation "*Phoebus was gone, long gone, his journey over*" is wildly different to how its original audience would have heard and experienced the work. Eavan Boland's translation of "*Foebus abierat*" (*Phoebus had gone*) is modernistically titled "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*". Boland's engagement with the poem as an art object becomes part of her translation process. The original poem has a musical and a highly visual, indeed, visionary appeal.

"*Foebus abierat*" is a sumptuous work, despite the brevity of the original fragment. We must begin to view "*Foebus abierat*" as an art object. Working outward from there, our interpretation of Boland's translation can increase our understanding of the medieval worldview through tracing her language and use of symbol in the translated work. The modern reader must look at Boland's translation of the original poem as collaborative. "*Foebus abierat*" provides points of interest for the postmodern reader whose experience and understanding of early performed poetry can be limited by current narrow approaches to poetic form.

The moral philosophical worldview inherent in "*Foebus abierat*" both contains and forgives the unidentified protagonist's stated transgression against the divine order which is manifested in the physical hierarchy of the observed world. This suggests that the original poem object is placed firmly in the religionist and homiletic genre. That the intent of the original poet is supremely retained and understood centuries later is a testament to Boland's skill as a collaborative translator. "*Foebus abierat*" moves swiftly from its mystical opening lines, through the speaker's expression of grief, and eventually toward her recognition of her earthly exile from the beloved. We can observe similar exilic themes in the Anglo-Saxon worldview, popular examples of homiletic poetry are **The Seafarer** and **The Wanderer**.

The major themes of "*Foebus abierat*" are transgression against the divine order, the grief of an earthly exile, and the loss of love. That the loss of the lover is subsumed beneath the protagonist's ultimate acceptance of her earthly exile points to the poem being homiletic in its intent. There are many examples of medieval mystic literature with similar themes as mentioned above. That "*Foebus Abierat*" is slightly different is evident, as the speaker is likely a woman, and we are aware that she comes alarmingly close to personal transgression in the poem fragment.

*Wait, wait for me. If you want, I can enter there.  
Because the truth is, I want to live with you forever."*

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

*But soon I regretted it—that I had spoken out this way.*

**The Wanderer**<sup>10</sup> for instance, describes a recognition of personal exile and a yearning for reunion with one’s fellows. It paints a crisis of exile and loss. It does not show the main protagonist as personally transgressive, thus it would provide comfort to the listening audience. In contrast, the protagonist in “*Foebus abierat*” is in danger of losing her immortal soul for love. That she barely survives this almost cataclysmic loss gives the poem its inherent tension.

In “*Foebus abierat*” we have a grief poem, a lament, wherein human desire almost rejects the divine will and the hierarchical order from whence it stems. “*Foebus abierat*” is inherently a moral poem despite its overtones of sorcery. While church doctrine is not overtly mentioned in the poem, its core theme of self-rescue from transgression against the hierarchical order is overt. This central theme of transgression and return to order would have been clearly understood by its listeners.

Boland's “*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*” had in its original form passed through centuries of war, turmoil and global cataclysm before it came to us on the printed page in translated form. The map of the globe and our understanding of our place in the world has radically altered since the anonymous poem was composed. That we are in another place, that our understanding of the world has expanded beyond the confines of illiteracy makes it all the more exciting that we can connect with the spirit of the work. Our previous reliance on the great oral traditions of sung poetry need not worry us too much, as reading poetry now is largely a communion between reader and text. We have lost our ability to hear poetry at a common level due to the post-enlightenment movement towards individualism in all things.

Contemporising a work such as “*Foebus abierat*” allows the reader to connect with a work of the imagination at our own experiential level of understanding. The reader begins to look at the translated work both as a dialogue between poet and poet translator, and as a poetic encounter. We participate in the translation of the work by contributing to it our energy, our visual, and our aural understanding. Somehow, the contemporary poet translator acts as a bridge between the originator poet and the reader, this chain of understanding connects us to a visual and aural literature written centuries ago. How is this achieved, how do we become active participants in the poem which is living now?

---

10**The Wanderer** translated by Roy Francis Leslie *University of Exeter Edition* (1988)

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

Eavan Boland brings us delightful poetic objects through her translation work. Jewellike shards and diamonds of surviving text glitter through poetic marginalia, such as that in the recovered text of *Pangur Bán* which Eavan Boland also translated. Dorothy L. Sayers' great translation work of Dante's *The Commedia* was left unfinished by her, and only latterly completed by Barbara Reynolds from Sayers' extensive translator's notes. We could mention Marion Glasscoe's work on *Julian of Norwich* in the same context. Modern women editors, poets and translators are bringing great poetry to contemporary audiences.

The modern poetry reader may require some contextual introduction to early works. We see that the poet translator is working in and through their encounter with the original poem as an object. The act of translation involves an active creative process that works outward from the lived experience of the poet translator. The integrity of Dorothy L. Sayers' or Eavan Boland's translatory approach can bring non-contemporaneous literature to a modern audience saturated with visual imagery and non-verbal understanding of universal religious themes. They allow us to wonder at how historical modes of human existence fit into our current perception of the universe.

A previous textual necessity for embedding moralistic themes into poetry due to general illiteracy and small access to reading matter does not lessen our appreciation of the worldview inherent in these famous works. Indeed, given our over-dependence on the visual image, and a concomitant reduction in our reading, one would argue that our ear has developed, or that we may be returning to an understanding of theme based in how we sound a poem. That the poet transcends time, in Boland's case, eleven centuries, to interact with the piece of art that she translates brings the reader directly into an intimate dialogue between the originator poet and the poet translator. Thus, a triumvirate of poet creator, reader, and poet translator is initiated. The modern poetry reader is never passive because she is encountering this ekphrastic work in the present time, even as she opens the book to the place where the poem is written. Now, that is some alchemy.

If we encounter the written text as an art object, then we begin to see that Boland's approach is ekphrastic. We do not need to narrow the definition of artistic encounter to fit it into a preconceived notion about what ekphrasis actually is. Poetry is an art form and the poet translator's encounter with this object brings to it a unique quality that does not rely on simple translation methods, but instead on the creative process and self-recognition. We witness the

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

translation process through the object work (the translated poem) and through translation notes retained by the translator for each of her works.

The moon, or Diana, functions in the poem both as a symbol and an actor. She is one of the major dramatis personae of “*Foebus abierat*”, she catalyses the homiletic theme at the core of the poem fragment, and in its contemporary translation. The moon is a mystical being, who, by the generosity of her illuminatory gift allows the meeting between the living woman and her dead lover. The moon is the originator of mythos, an illuminator, and an ally to the grieving woman. That the unidentified woman speaker ultimately rejects the moon's gift as transgressive and against the divine order does not lessen the moon's presence in the development of the poem's theme.

Boland discusses her approach to this translation, <sup>11</sup>

*“ I have followed its incantations tonally rather than rhythmically. I have tried for a plainspoken note so as to make more contemporary this wonderful, long-ago cry of a woman finding and losing a body and soul—all in an instant. “*

Boland's notes on the poem increase the interest of the reader, and therefore her participation in this work. It is possible that this anonymous poem was written by a woman, although it is not clear who authored it. Historically, anonymous translations and their authorship are difficult to attribute due to the nature of the work. Access to educational materials was limited to monasteries, wealthy houses, and libraries. The material and thematic progress of the poem is, however, secular and mystical.

From the outset of “*Foebus abierat*” we are confronted with Boland's energetic approach to her translation,

ST 1

Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over.

His sister was riding high: nothing bridled her.

Boland then sets up a tension between the sleeping world and the light of radical vision enacted through Phoebus' sister, the moon,

---

<sup>11</sup> From ‘Translator’s Note, ‘*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*’ (**Poetry, 2008**) by Eavan Boland.



*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

ST 1.

Her light was falling, shining into woods and rivers.

Wild animals opened their jaws wide, stirred to prey.

Here the moon does not mourn the loss of her brother, but continues in her necessary operation; *'nothing bridled her'*. Moon lights the world and opens out the portal into the space wherein the dead Phoebus can re-enter, be it as vision or in his non-physical actuality. The brief and unaccountable return of Phoebus can be interpreted as a gift from the moon to the lover. That the speaker protagonist cannot enter into the gift brings her the awareness of her grief and of her humanity. A double-edged gift if there ever was one.

Boland reiterates this initial image in ST5 picking up on the tension initialised in her introductory stanza. The instance of reunion, or allowed moment, closes. The entire action of the lovers reunion occurs within seconds. Boland uses form to create and sustain the instant of recognition and of loss. The poem's action segues toward ST 5, but in essence it is static in terms of time. Language enlivens

the text giving the illusion of time passing within the poem, it is not time, but energy encapsulating a nanosecond, a moment of retrieval.

ST 5.

And all the time, the windows of the terrace had been wide open.

The light of the moon poured down; its beauty, its radiance.

The moon's mystical status and divine persona is always other. The moon is not personalised in ST 5, she has become 'it', perhaps denoting the difference between the mortal and the divine heroines, or the speaker and Diana.

The moon becomes a catalyst for the action of the poem. Her light enables the drama of the translated poem. Moonlight creates the scene for the reader, that peculiar between-place wherein the action of the poem occurs. The sacred space at the opening of the poem allows the reader to adjust their thinking to the possibility of mythos, and to drop ungainly concepts like chronological time. We are invited to be aware that we are entering the mystic realm. Her light is both object and participant within the body of Boland's translated text.

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

We are invited through "*Foebus abierat*" to enter into realms that are other, "*But in the human world all was sleep, pause, relaxation, torpor*". We are permitted to allow full rein to our imaginative engagement with the written text. We are aware and recognise that grief is a dominating factor in the poem. We are also aware that the protagonist realises her transgression against nature in her vocalised death wish. As a result of her catalyzing meeting with the imagined Phoebus, the speaker-protagonist allows herself to grieve, ultimately recognising and accepting her humanity. While "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*" is secular mystical in its overt language and symbolic overtones, it contains within it an affirmation of perceived order and of the medieval worldview.

The newly dead Phoebus has become 'other.' His sister, the moon, gifts a moment of grace or reunion to his purely human lover. She can accept the gift or not. The poem protagonist avers her living condition, she is from the realm of the living.

*I opened my arms wide and pressed him against my body.  
Then I froze: I was ice, all ice. My blood drained into it.  
He had fled. Here was my embrace—and there was nothing in it.*

The lover's deathwish is transgressive according to a worldview where sin includes suicide or harm to the created self. The beauty of the world is denoted and illustrated by the rift between the feeling creaturely world, as the world of human emotion and intellection is by the momentary visitation of the newly dead. We would have a whole other poem if the speaker protagonist goes with Phoebus, the poem and translation presents this possibility as subtly enticing.

'*But soon I regretted it—that I had spoken out this way*' represents the protagonist's awareness of her transgression against the divine order. Whilst the surface imagery of the poem is exposed as secular mystical by Boland, its deep root exposes the speaker's desire as transgressive. The speaker protagonist's recognition of her transgression against her perception of the divine order abruptly closes the moon-created portal wherein Phoebus entered. It allows her to grieve, a purely human and creaturely rejection of fantasy,

*Wait, wait for me. If you want, I can enter there.  
Because the truth is, I want to live with you forever."  
But soon I regretted it—that I had spoken out this way.*

Weeping brings relief to the speaker protagonist of '*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*'. That the speaker feels her exile from the realm of the dead which we, the reader, experience or understand as a worldview found in numerous works including Anglo-Saxon works such '**The Wanderer**' and others. There is no overt religiosity apparent in the poem,

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

but we know that the experience of grief separates us from both the animal and the godly realm. Grief brings us to earth and we are faced with our own mortality.

The poem is left open-ended, mounting our concern for the speaker, the protagonist. She is alone in the world, not accessing either the world of fantasy & religion nor even a part of nature. We are left alone with her self-recognition. We leave the poet in her grief and we shut the door, what else can we do? The world, radiantly lit by Phoebus' sister is a backdrop to her loss and grief. We hope that the speaker will find her place in this world. The poem's action occurs against a moonlit backdrop, a momentary relief is endowed by semi-divine light. The speaker's personal transgression against the divine order is moralistic and contains a universal lesson aimed at a listening audience.

Boland's '*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*' creates a tableau vivant in its spare visuals, it's an exotic beauty. The only way to respond to this poem as an object is ekphrastically, or to view the original poem as art. We have entered an imagistic, imaginative territory, that that is accomplished over five barely descriptive stanzas is a testament to understanding the poem's milieu and using language as movement. Language creates the energy of the poem translation.

Is the speaker's vocalised death wish cause for solemnity in “*Foebus abierat*”?

*“Because the truth is, I want to live with you forever.  
But soon I regretted it—that I had spoken out this way. “*

If we wish to introduce a control element to how Boland approaches the translation process, we can look briefly at another work of translation by the poet. In this instance, I have chosen her rapid, almost tenacious translation of “*Pangur Bán*, an 11th-century note written into the margins of a manuscript in the Monastery of St Paul, Carinthia, Austria.

“*Pangur Bán*” has been translated by Robin Flower, Seamus Heaney, Frank O'Connor, Eavan Boland and others. Boland's translation text is energetic and catlike. She cuts away any descriptive superfluity and inherent historicity in the poem. Her rolling words mimic the action of the 11th Century cat.

And his delight when his claws  
Close on his prey  
Equals mine when sudden clues  
Light my way.

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

Action and light are important tools in Eavan Boland's poetic work. Both "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*" and "*Pangur Bán*" evince Boland's relation to language and to the translation process. Instantaneous approaches to and revelation of the passing of time are elements of both translations, more in "*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*" than in "*Pangur Bán*", although we begin to understand her energy when we examine the translated text of "*Pangur Bán*".

"*Pangur Bán*" can be read as an exposition of the artistic process, we can trace the process through the words of the long dead scribe, who hunts each riddle from dark to light. The creative process is a toil and it lacks glamour. Writing poetry appears to be the most marginalised of the liberal arts. It is isolating, yet the rewards of inspiration far outweigh sedentary isolation. The unidentified author of "*Pangur Bán*" transcends his solitude by speaking directly through poetic form with us, the readers.

Poetry is true art, that we often lack the tools to engage with poetry as art is an indictment of our ability to read and understand the work before us. Poetry can truly capture the sense of a moment, more than any other art. The outer form and language of the poem contains eternities of moments. Paul Celan's monumental "*Todesfuge*" ("*Death Waltz*") can be considered akin to Pablo Picasso's "*Guernica*", yet Celan is little known to the general poetry reader because we have consigned poetry to the margins. Visual art and music has a sense of moment that requires our intellectual engagement; yet we have lost that ability to engage poetically. The visual and musical arts transcend linguistic niceties and do not require translation or contextualisation by academics.

That we have lost a commonality or universal understanding speaks more to us of our lack of community. Translation re-energises ancient poetry and work bringing it back to the forefront. In "*Pangur Bán*", we have a wry introduction to the the creative process and the incessant waiting and busy work that form the process. We are participating in the creative process through our intellectual engagement with the work before us. This shows us that poetry can transcend issues of marginalisation, historical memory, and language through the will and craft of the talented and engaged translator,

Neither bored, both hone  
At home a separate skill  
Moving after hours alone  
To the kill

When at last his net wraps  
After a sly fight  
Around a mouse; mine traps  
Sudden insight.

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

On my cell wall here,  
His sight fixes, burning,  
Searching; my old eyes peer  
At new learning,

And his delight when his claws  
Close on his prey  
Equals mine when sudden clues  
Light my way.

from “*Pangur Bán*” (translated by Eavan Boland)

The same immediacy of language, in word choice and in rapid movement is evident in ST3 of “*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*” there is no room for escape, or for breath in the above stanza. An instant occurs wherein a lifetime of desire is shewn to the reader. This instance occurs in a dream space that wraps up time and rolls it out again, as we would furl and unfurl a flag. Reality is bendable here.

*I shuddered at his touch. I felt the fear of it.  
I trembled as if I knew the true terror of it.  
I opened my arms wide and pressed him against my body.  
Then I froze: I was ice, all ice. My blood drained into it.  
He had fled. Here was my embrace—and there was nothing in it.*

(*‘Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over’ translated by Eavan Boland*)

The physical setting of “*Pangur Bán*” is in direct contrast to the above excerpt from “*Phoebus*” which, we are aware occurs in a dream space. Here we are confronted with an altogether more prosaic place set in the physical actuality of the monastic cell. The art of the monk creator is exposed for us with a tenacity likened to the cat’s stalking and kill,

*When at last his net wraps  
After a sly fight  
Around a mouse; mine traps  
Sudden insight.*

The writer transcends her solitude by speaking directly through poetic form to her reader. Poetry is true art, that we often lack the tools to engage with poetry as art is an indictment of

*A Modern Encounter with “Foebus abierat” ; On Eavan Boland’s “Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over”*

our ability to read and understand the work before us. We can read and reread the translated text, always aware that we are wholly reliant on the translator's skill and empathy toward the poem object. We can transform it through altering the language, but essentially insightfulness and understanding of the creative process brings the translator directly to her encounter with the poem as an object. A transformative moment occurs which changes the text and allows the translator to personalise her process of engagement. This is ekphrasis and without it translation would indeed be hollow, an empty vessel holding a stale wine. The reader discerns the success of the ekphrastic process through their relation to the translated work.

The reader perceives the creative process as a continuance, oftentimes grounded in duty work. In “*Pangur Bán*” it is surely prosaic until the flash of inspiration occurs. The monk's flash of insight elicited by the activity of the hunter cat allows him to enter into another level of creative understanding. Our grasp of “*Pangur Bán*’s” theme is a magnesium flash which illuminates the poetic creative process. It must be utilised in the collaborative translatory process too. The poet translator reaches through time to the poet originator, taking with her the present reader. We are privileged to enter new worlds.

*On my cell wall here,  
His sight fixes, burning,  
Searching; my old eyes peer  
At new learning,*

*‘Pangur Bán’ translated by Eavan Boland*

Animal imagery dominates the text of “*Foebus abierat*”. There is a rift between the animal and human realm which creates the fantastic portal wherein Phoebus returns, or where the longing of his lover has created his temporary non-physical likeness. The protagonist speaker’s desire for reunion is so strong that her will and the will of the dead have created or allowed a last image of the beloved to appear.

“*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*” the Eavan Boland titled translation of ‘*Foebus abierat*’ succeeds in translation, as it retains the poem’s original tension between the sacred and the profane in a delicate balance. The contemporary reader is made aware of the tension inherent in the poem from the very outset of Boland’s delivery, wherein a hierarchy is exposed which includes the created world, the human world and the world of beasts. We are made aware that the action of the poem occurs in a no-place where the accepted physical and godly hierarchies can have no impact on human desires. That there is danger in even a

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

momentary abandonment of the medieval worldview is made abundantly clear. While we are at a remove from the homiletic intent of the poem, we can appreciate its inherent tension from the outset to the mature exposition of the theme of the poem; transgression against the divine order is subtle and requires moral strength and self-recognition to oppose.

At the outset of this essay I remarked on our modernism and how it narrows the poetic field, especially in relation to how we view ekphrastic and collaborative approaches to translation. That "*Foebus abierat*" was composed for performance to an audience, and that it had a musical structure allows the translator to approach the work ekphrastically with the poem as 'art object'. We cannot investigate works like "*Foebus abierat*" from our jaundiced approach to form which discounts the wealth of early poetry and its attendant philosophical worldview.

Dorothy L. Sayers, Marion Glasscoe, Barbara Reynolds and Eavan Boland have succeeded in bringing many works of art to modern audiences, and while the form of the work and our expectation therein is vastly different to how the original audience experienced and understood it, we are privileged to get an understanding of how it must have been for them as participants in an unfolding drama of "*Foebus abierat*". This can only be achieved through an intelligent and sensitive approach to the art of poetry translation.

Poetic tension is a created thing involving two or more ideas that require balance within the form of the work. '*Foebus abierat*' or '*Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over*' is a complex and unique work given the hiddenness of its homiletic intent. That the speaker's momentary transgression against the divine order is evident to us in translated form points to Boland's delicate handling of the two tensions in the poem fragment.

Irish women poets must constantly fight the perceived role of poetry or the notion of the importance of heroic poetry to the intellectual development of the post-independent Irish State. There is an evident absence of strong women early modernist and modernist writers in our literary heritage, and we lack strong examples of Irish women poets in our academic studies. That we have no early modernist examples of women poets akin to the progressive modernists like Stein and Dickinson should point clearly to that lack. That women poets are under-represented academically and also wholly absent from early anthologies of Irish poetry has resulted in intellectual deprivations, the cost of which we are still counting. Poets like Boland and Freda Laughton bring a voice to this desert of absence through their work as poets, and in Boland's case, as a translator of heroic and difficult works like "*Foebus*

*A Modern Encounter with "Foebus abierat" ; On Eavan Boland's "Phoebus Was Gone, all Gone, His Journey Over"*

*abierat*". That we can site "*Foebus abierat*" in the Irish context of a historical suppression of the female narrative gives Boland's translation a finely hewn edge.

The most important revelation in Eavan Boland's translation of "Phoebus was gone, all gone, his journey over" is that of internal tension and of anarchic transgression against the perception of the ordained order. In many ways this subtle little poem translation exposes the tension at the heart of Boland's work, the absence of strong female protagonists and their anonymity in the Irish literary canon. To bring women into the national dialogue requires an unearthing of the dusty archives and a multi-disciplinary approach to the study and exposition of women's intellectual work. The speaker protagonist's capitulation to the divine order and her grief are not victories because she is weighted against a mindset which she will never quite transcend. Her desires are heroic and her submission is lamentable. Exposing the inherent tensions at the heart of a mindset that claims "*Thou shalt not*" is a beginning step to bringing light to the lack at the heart of the Irish poetic canon with its jaundiced heroicism and multifarious womenly absences.